



Brownfields Showcase Community Gila River Indian Community, AZ

Outreach and Special Projects Staff (5105)

Quick Reference Fact Sheet

Brownfields are abandoned, idled or underused industrial and commercial properties where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived contamination. In May 1997, Vice President Gore announced a Brownfields National Partnership to bring together the resources of more than 15 federal agencies to address local cleanup and reuse issues in a more coordinated manner. In 1998, this multi-agency partnership designated 16 "Brownfields Showcase Communities"—models demonstrating the benefits of collaborative activity on brownfields. In October 2000, the partnership selected 12 additional "Brownfields Showcase Communities" to continue the success of the initiative. The Brownfields Showcase Communities are distributed across the country and vary by size, resources, and community type. A wide range of support will be leveraged, depending on the particular needs of each Showcase Community.

BACKGROUND

The Brownfields National Partnership has selected the Gila River Indian Community as a Brownfields Showcase Community. The Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) is a federally recognized tribe with a resident population of 15,084 members of the Akimel O'odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) Tribes. The community is located in south-central Arizona in Maricopa and Pinal counties. The northern boundary of GRIC is adjacent to the Phoenix metropolitan area, which is a serious non-attainment area for ozone and particulate matter under the Federal Clean Air Act. In addition, the Maricopa County portion of GRIC lies within the non-attainment area.

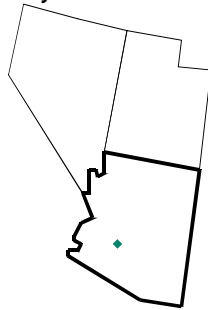
GRIC's economy was mainly agricultural-based during the early 1900s until agricultural produc-

tion was devastated by the loss of surface water due to diversions by farmers upstream of the community. GRIC established three industrial parks in the 1970s and two casinos in the late 1990s. Because of dire economic needs facing the community, many leases for commercial or industrial activity on tribal land did not include adequate assurances for proper cleanup and, therefore, have been left abandoned with residual contamination. As the community grows, progress may be stopped or slowed by the threat of contamination at these sites. Further, many of the sites pose

threats to groundwater, which is the only source of drinking water for the community.

Before the first casino opened, GRIC's unemployment rate was greater than 60 percent. Now unemployment at GRIC still remains six times higher than the Phoenix metropolitan area. The

Community Profile



Gila River Indian Community, AZ

The Gila River Indian Community will continue its commitment to sustainable development that preserves the environment for future generations. The tribe plans to redevelop its brownfields, including a closed military base, to support sustainable reuses such as agriculture and high tech production.

community will target several sites, including the former Williams Air Force Base landfill, two of the three industrial parks, seven agricultural air strips, five abandoned farms, the Memorial Airfield (a former military facility), and several old landfills. The third industrial park—the Blackwater Industrial Park—is being targeted by an EPA Brownfields Assessment Demonstration Pilot awarded in 2000.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

GRIC has experience and growing capacity to manage cleanups and redevelopment efforts. In 1995, GRIC established a Department of Environmental Quality to manage environmental quality for sustainable development. The community's brownfields projects directly link economic redevelopment to key housing, commercial, and agricultural needs.

The community has worked with EPA, Department of Defense (DOD), and others to address contamination at many of the sites targeted through the Showcase Community project area, including working to remove portions of the former Williams Air Force Base—a base realignment and closure (BRAC) facility—from EPA's National Priorities List. Currently, GRIC manages approximately \$1.3 million from more than 14 EPA grants. In addition, environmental cleanup is a high priority for the community and its leadership, which has allocated more than \$200,000 in cleanup funding since 1996. Other highlights of GRIC's brownfields and related economic development efforts include:

- Working with an intergovernmental stakeholder group on the economic reuse plan for the former Williams Air Force Base, including identifying potential reuse options for the 41-acre landfill;
- Finalizing a revised road construction and improvement plan through the community's Department of Transportation;

- Developing, with U.S. Bureau of Reclamation funding, a major irrigation water delivery system and, with funding from the community, a local water delivery infrastructure in hopes of expanding its current 40,000 acres of agricultural land to 120,000 acres during the next 10 years;
- Appropriating general revenue funds for loans to community members for farm development within the community;
- Working with its Utility Authority Board on solar and other alternative energy prospects, especially in brownfields redevelopment projects;
- Assisting potential entrepreneurs in the community through the U.S. Small Business Administration's pre-qualification office for loans and guarantees;
- Allocating other funds for educational scholarships, infrastructure development, housing, recycling, and long-term employment growth;
- Working to ensure accelerated compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which is relevant to most commercial, housing, or industrial development because the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) must sign or record most leases within GRIC;
- Supplementing the accelerated NEPA process with a "Business and Land Development Procedure" that provides an integrated, interagency review of every community and commercial development at GRIC to help reduce the risk of creating additional brownfields;
- Spent \$100,000 on the cleanup at the Blackwater Industrial Park;
- Updating the community's existing land use plan to prepare for continued growth, particularly in housing and recreational facilities and agricultural development; and
- Promoting active community involvement to get input and set priorities on site cleanup and reuse.

SHOWCASE COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES

GRIC plans to use the Showcase Community project to serve the very low-income, minority population of the community. For all of its reuse projects, the community has strong hiring requirements, consistent with federal law, that provide preferences to qualified Native Americans. The project anticipates continued and expanded partnerships with BIA, the Indian Health Service, EPA, U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Transportation, and U.S. Department of Agriculture. In addition, GRIC will continue its own interdepartment and interagency working team to implement this project.

The proposed landfill project at the former Williams Air Force Base will serve as a model for full cleanup and redevelopment of former bases, which often pose considerable multi-jurisdictional challenges. It will

provide a useful model for other tribes that may want to participate in base closure or other DOD redevelopment projects. From a broader perspective, this Showcase Community project will serve as a model for sustainable development because tribal governments have strong practical and cultural interests in development that does not endanger the quality of the environment for the future. The project will demonstrate the wide range of approaches tribes can use to protect their land, clean up contamination, and stimulate redevelopment despite the special land tenure and economic restraints faced by most tribal governments.

Contacts

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For more information on the Brownfields Showcase Communities, visit the EPA Brownfields Web site at:
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/showcase.htm>.